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THE FUTURE OF NATO IN THE POST OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM WORLD

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THE FUTURE OF NATO IN THE POST OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM WORLD

“We share more than an alliance. We share a civilization . . . The unity of values and aspirations calls us to new tasks . . . our transatlantic community must have priorities beyond the consolidation of European peace.¹”

George W. Bush, June 2001

INTRODUCTION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been heralded as one of the most successful alliances ever conceived and can arguably be said to have partially caused the downfall of the Soviet Union. The political debates leading up to the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and the subsequent military action that occurred without the support of several key NATO members have called into question, on both sides of the Atlantic, the value of maintaining the alliance.

This essay takes the position that NATO remains an important element of the U.S. National Military Strategy and has the potential to be transformed into an even more significant partner in accomplishing the military objectives of the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS).

BACKGROUND

NATO came into being in April 1949 when the United States and 11 other nations joined in an alliance that was primarily aimed at containing the Soviet Union from further

¹ President Bush's Remarks at Warsaw University, 15 June 2001; US Embassy text, London.

expansion into Western Europe. From the very beginning, the alliance has had both a political and military aspect to it.² While the Soviet Union existed, the military aspect, deterrence of a Soviet attack coupled with the ability to repel that attack if deterrence failed, held primacy. Many people argued that with the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1990, NATO became an alliance without a common enemy and as noted by Thomas Hobbs 300 years ago, alliances usually dissolve after the threat that caused their establishment disappears.³

However, NATO did not disappear. Instead, it increasingly emphasized political objectives over military efficiency. The decision to expand NATO membership to include former Warsaw Pact countries is evidence of this. First articulated in Prague by President Clinton in January 1994, the issue of expanding NATO was initially opposed by the U.S. military and numerous NATO members because the applicant nations' lack of military proficiency was seen to be a liability rather than an asset.⁴ The events of 11 September 2001 presented a new challenge to the United States as well as its European allies. It also presented an opportunity to again define NATO's primary purpose in terms of a common enemy. That opportunity is now under attack as a result of OIF.

² Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty committed the members to "further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions ...and by promoting conditions of stability and well being. Forster, Anthony and William Wallace, "What Is NATO For?" *Survival*, Winter 2001-2002, pp 111. Article 5 in the central rationale for the military aspect of the alliance by declaring an attack against one member is an attack against all members and charging all members to assist the party or parties attacked.

³ Goldgeier, James M. *Not Whether But When, The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.)1999. pp 3. Goldgeier argues that NATO could just as easily have dissolved instead of expanded.

⁴ Goldgeier, pp 4.

THE CASE AGAINST NATO

The United States invests significant resources to maintain NATO, both in terms of dollars and personnel deployed to Europe (over 100,000 U.S. troops today). That investment makes sense if the U.S. is gaining an increased ability to execute its National Security Strategy as a result of the alliance. President Bush left little doubt in his Warsaw address quoted at the start of this essay that he envisioned a NATO that was both willing and capable of doing just that. Several events in recent years would seem to indicate that is not the case.

The most troubling event is OIF. While many NATO nations are members of “the coalition of the willing,” many more are not. Of those that are members, even fewer have actually contributed troops, equipment, or financial assistance. France and Germany went as far as to actively organize international resistance against U.S. military action in Iraq, with France having threatened to veto a proposed United Nations Security Council resolution that would have set an ultimatum date for Iraqi compliance. U.S. newspapers have been full of editorials predicting that NATO cannot survive such internal strife and some suggesting that nations with such divergent strategic views cannot be effective allies.⁵

In both OIF and Desert Storm, coalitions fought the Iraqis. If it is a coalition that the U.S. will ultimately form for a given war, why waste the resources to form and maintain alliances?

In the one recent military action the U.S. did undertake with an alliance, the NATO intervention in Kosovo, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) noted how

⁵ Some NATO theorists contend that divergent strategic views stem from different threat perceptions. Forster, pp 109. During the 2003 annual colloquium between the National War College (NWC) and the Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires (CHEM), French officers participating in NATO discussions with American officers acknowledged they did not feel the same sense of national survival threat from terrorist activities that Americans felt

difficult it was for a nineteen-nation alliance to wage a coherent military campaign.⁶ If SACEUR found it difficult to exercise command and control with an alliance of nineteen nations, that problem will only be exacerbated as NATO continues to expand. Just getting the authority for NATO to conduct out of area operations requires a consensus decision, something that becomes less and less likely as nations with substantially different cultures and histories become members.

Another event of concern to NATO stability is the emerging desire of some European nations to have a separate defense strategy and capability for the European Union. France has been the most ardent supporter of this idea, espousing a desire for a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) that is separate and distinct from NATO. U.S. concerns have focused around the EU drawing from forces designated to support NATO and those forces subsequently not being available when needed by NATO.⁷

The final charge against NATO is more a trend than an event and it has occurred over time. While the U.S. has always been the dominant member of NATO both in terms of the size of the force committed to the alliance and the lethality of the equipment that force brings to bear, the capabilities gap between the U.S. and its European allies has increased dramatically in recent years.⁸ While a capabilities gap was understood to be part of the

post 11 September 2001. For an example of an editorial warning about the deteriorating status of NATO, see Tyler, Patrick E. "A Deepening Fissure," *The New York Times*, 6 March 2003.

⁶ Clark, Wesley K. *Waging Modern War. Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat*. PublicAffairs 2001. pp XX. Gen Clark praises NATO action during the Kosovo campaign and notes that the operation was ultimately a success. He does however; describe throughout his book the unique command and control problems associated with fighting an alliance. He particularly notes the problems with targeting approval for air strikes.

⁷ Martin, Laurence. *The Global Century: Globalization and National Security*, INSS/NDU, May 2001. pp 603.

⁸ A briefing given at the NWC during April, 2003 by two U.S. military planners that work NATO issues at the Pentagon noted that the single biggest lesson learned by NATO allies that participated in Desert Storm was just

reality of taking on new members, the U.S. has been troubled by the reluctance of older members to allocate sufficient funding to maintain relevant and capable military forces. There is concern in the pentagon that the capabilities gap could put U.S. forces at risk if those forces are relying on NATO allies for compatible military skill sets.⁹

THE CASE FOR NATO

NATO, from its very conception has been considered a vital national interest of the United States. During the cold war, the military significance of the alliance was tied directly to the survival of the state. As noted by President Truman, the Soviet Union did not have to attack the U.S. in order to dominate the world; it merely had to isolate the U.S. by conquering its allies.¹⁰ While the 1990's brought the end of the cold war, and a belief in the U.S. that there was a dramatic drop in the threat to the survival of the state, NATO was nonetheless considered to be of vital importance to the nation as a source of stability for a Western Europe that was threatened by the instability of Eastern Europe.¹¹ For the U.S., the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 caused an awareness that there still existed a substantial threat to the survival of the state and NATO has once again taken on a vital military significance to countering that threat.¹² NATO's first ever evocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty has led to unprecedented support by NATO allies in intelligence

how far they had fallen behind the U.S. in military capabilities. The planners believed this was the driving force behind recent French increases in military budget allocations. Due to the NWC non-attribution policy, the U.S. planners cannot be further identified. Also see Forster, pp 109.

⁹ NWC briefing, April 2003.

¹⁰ NWC course syllabus for "Fundamentals of Strategic Logic," Academic Year 2002-2203. pp 81.

¹¹ Biddle, Stephan. "U.S. Forces in Europe," in *American Defense Annual*. (New York; Lexington Books 1994), pp 89.

gathering, policing and financial scrutiny of terrorist organizations and support on the ground during U.S. led efforts in Afghanistan.

What may prove to be of even greater value to the U.S. in the long run is NATO's ability to provide substantial forces for peacekeeping operations both within and outside European territory. As the U.S. military moves to develop a national military strategy that calls for dominance across the range of military operations (ROMO) it will need help from its closest allies. The number of military operations that could stem from the NSS of September 2002 could overwhelm an already heavily committed U.S. military. Had there not been NATO forces participating in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, EU forces supported by NATO forces in Macedonia and French forces evacuating U.S. citizens in Cote d'Ivoire, in recent months, than U.S. Forces might have had to be pulled from OIF. While U.S. forces are skilled and capable of handling ROMO high-end operations, too many such operations occurring simultaneously will result in something less than dominance at the low end of ROMO, unless NATO allies can be used to meet such requirements. Prior to 11 September 2001, stability operations, would have received much less attention; the U.S. could have afforded to accept something less than dominance in that area. But a recognition that failed states and chaotic environments can provide terrorist organizations with fertile operating environments, means that stability operations cannot be short-changed. European allies are well suited to conduct such operations.¹³ Many of them have constabulary type military forces such as French gendarmes and Italian carabinieri that the U.S. lacks. In

¹² Kimball, Warren F. "Alliances, Coalitions, and Ententes," in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy* (2nd ed.), vol. 1 (New York: Scriber's 2001), pp. 13.

addition, many European nations that have more pacifist type cultures are more comfortable contributing to NATO in this type capacity, and while stability operations require level-headed, disciplined troops, they do not necessarily require sophisticated equipment or innovative combat techniques and hence are less effected by the capabilities divide between the U.S. and European allies.

Coalitions may very well be the way the U.S. will go to war in the future in all cases that do not involve a direct attack on an alliance member. But that does not mean there is not a substantial military advantage to cultivating highly developed alliances. Alliances have the ability to develop detailed contingency plans that can be rehearsed and promulgated. This adds a deterrence value not found with coalitions.¹⁴ If deterrence fails and the plans must be executed by a “coalition of the willing,” then there is a good chance that there will be at least some members of the alliance in that coalition and hence a foundation of tactics, techniques and procedures around which the coalition can operate. “In the universe of alliances, NATO is unique in the depth and range of its integration.¹⁵” Why would the U.S. want to give up that depth to start anew with every new coalition formed only weeks (in the case of an operations like OIF) before the coalition must cross the line of departure?

Even though coalitions are more likely to be utilized in non-Article 5 military actions, it does not mean that NATO will never be used in that capacity. As General Clark noted about Kosovo, “the NATO nations voluntarily undertook this war. It was not forced on

¹³ “Multinational forces under NATO command in Bosnia and Kosovo, using NATO procedures and doctrine, have demonstrated levels of professionalism and effectiveness which contrast sharply with UN forces in Sierra Leone and Rwanda.” Forster, pp 116.

¹⁴ Martin. pp 602.

¹⁵ Martin. Pp 603.

them, nor was it strictly defensive, in the ordinary sense.¹⁶ In similar type operations the full synergy of an integrated, trained, disciplined alliance can be brought to bear against an enemy.

HOW NATO CAN BE BETTER

OIF truly did cause a rift within NATO that is of crisis proportions. But it is not the first time the alliance has suffered such a dangerous divergence of strategic view, nor the first time a member or members have felt betrayed by allies. The U.S. decision to not support the French and British intervention in Egypt in 1956 and to subsequently apply substantial pressure on those nations to withdraw left very bitter feelings, but the alliance survived. Nor has the U.S. ever had substantial success in getting NATO to provide meaningful support for out of area operations, Korea and Vietnam being the biggest disappointments,¹⁷ and yet the alliance survived. In all the cases above, there was, to some degree, a taking for granted the assumption of alliance unity. In the case of OIF, the French did not understand the level of threat felt by Americans and the Americans did not understand the French belief that the issue went beyond Iraq and was a precursor to one nation rule of international politics.¹⁸

If European nations are to ever truly understand the nature of the threat as it relates to the U.S. and to Western society as a whole, they must do a realistic threat assessment. Not an easy task for nations that have felt so secure that they have allowed their armed forces to slip to the low capability level they presently possess. A realistic threat assessment might

¹⁶ Clark. Pp 418

¹⁷ Kimball, pp 25.

¹⁸ NWC – CHEM exchange discussions, April, 2003. Also from a lecture presented during the CHEM exchange by Therese Delpach, a French expert in weapons of mass destruction and advisor to UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix and article “Le Monde Views Diplomatic Background to Franco-US Friction Over US,” Le Monde, 27 March 03.

generate politically embarrassing questions about the dearth of defense spending in recent years. For the U.S., a less demanding tone on proposed courses of action might go a long way towards winning European concurrence of those courses of action.

Even if the U.S. and its European allies could agree on the threat and on a course of action, there still remains the issue of European inability to respond to the threat because they cannot execute the course of action. The most promising solution to this problem is two fold: the continued pressure by the U.S. for Europeans to spend more on defense and the realization of the NATO rapid response force. The vehicle that seems to be getting some Europeans to spend more on defense is the ESDP. The U.S. should move away from any notion this policy is a threat to NATO, recognize that it is dependant on NATO for logistic support that will ultimately keep it tied to the alliance. The NATO rapid reaction force is a U.S. proposed standing force of some 20,000 NATO service members. It includes a brigade on the ground, 200 sorties a day in the air, a naval task force, and associated logistic support. The force trains for 6 months, must pass a certification process, and then is on call for 6 months. NATO nations will sign up several years in advance for the portion of the force they feel they are capable of providing and then work on funding and training that force accordingly.¹⁹ The challenge will be developing the rules for use of this force. They must be structured so that a given member nation could not pull out a critical part of the force because it does not like a mission the force has been assigned. A force of this size, properly trained

¹⁹ NWC briefing, April 2003.

and certified could be a real asset for low-level combat operations and initial stability operations.²⁰

The final recommended change to NATO as it exists today would be a slackening of the consensus requirement for non-Article 5 action. As NATO expands to 25 plus nations, it will become almost impossible to get consensus. There should be a mechanism to allow the use of the NATO flag for operations if the “coalition of the willing” includes some agreed upon fraction of member nations.

CONCLUSION

NATO has been one of the most successful alliances ever designed and executed. It's primary function and collective capability levels have changed substantially over the years to match substantial changes to the world strategic environment. The survival and utility of the alliance has always been a vital national interest of the United States. Despite the recent complications caused by OIF, and a failure in recent years by most European nations to maintain forces with military skills compatible with U.S. forces, the alliance remains today a vital national interest of the United States.

As the U.S. military attempts to achieve dominance across the spectrum of military operations, NATO should be considered for missions in that spectrum where its forces can have a significant impact. Stability operations are one such mission.²¹ NATO can also become more capable to accomplish higher-level missions if the NATO rapid reaction force

²⁰ “developing NATO rapid reaction force would perfectly compliment US efforts to confront new security concerns such as terrorism.” Cole, Debra. “Top NATO general unveils overhaul plans for US bases in Europe,” Agence France-Presse. 3 March 2003.

²¹ “What we will eventually need in Iraq is a credible peacekeeping force that is multilateral, legitimate and still led by the U.S. That will bring us back to NATO, possibly in partnership with some Arab and Muslim armies.” Friedman, Thomas L. “NATO's New Front,” The New York Times. 30 March 2003.

is funded, trained, and deployed and the NATO nation's that supply the elements of the force do not try to micro-manage employment of the force. Even though there are probably many future military operations that the U.S. will be involved in that will not receive NATO consensus for action, there is still a great value in honing and defining NATO tactics, techniques, and procedures to use as a core for any future "coalition of the willing."

Whatever deficiencies, complications, and frustrations surround NATO, it still possesses the most skilled allies available to the U.S. for future combat operations; the U.S. would be foolish not to capitalize on that fact.